

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-10 ACDA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7175

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONGEN JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY COPENHAAGEN

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 3880

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT IS JO

SUBJECT: PERES DEFENDS PRESENCE OF "WORKERS"

AT WEST BANK SITE

REF: TEL AVIV 3489

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. IN STORMY JUNE 17
KNESSET DEBATE, DEFMIN PERES DEFENDED HIS DECISION
TO ALLOW WORKERS INVOLVED IN CONSTRUCTION OF
MILITARY INSTALLATION AT BAAL HATZOR ON WEST
BANK TO LIVE IN FORMER JORDANIAN ARMY CAMP
CALLED MAHANE OFRA (REFTEL).

2. PERES SAID THAT HE HAD AUTHORIZED WORKERS
TO UTILIZE MAHANE OFRA AS A "WORK CAMP" AND
HAD INFORMED THEM THAT CAMP WAS NOT RECOGNIZED
AS A SETTLEMENT. HE ASSERTED THAT A GOVERNMENT
DECISION WAS NOT NECESSARY TO ESTABLISH A WORK
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CAMP. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT SHOULD IT SEEM

NECESSARY HE WOULD NOT HESITATE TO ASK GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH PERMANENT SETTLEMENT AT BAAL HATZOR.

3. PERES FURTHER EXPLAINED THAT INSTALLATIONS AT BAAL HATZOR MUST OPERATE ON 24 HOUR BASIS AND IT WAS THEREFORE DEEMED PREFERABLE FOR CIVILIAN STAFF TO SLEEP NEARBY. HE SAID HE HAD AUTHORIZED USE OF JORDANIAN BARRACKS SINCE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT YET MADE A DECISION ON HIS PROPOSAL TO BUILD CIVILIAN HOUSING AT THE SITE.

4. AT CONCLUSION OF DEBATE, THREE MOTIONS WERE REFERRED TO COMMITTEE, ONE BY SARID (MAPAI DOVE) CRITICIZING PRESENCE OF THE GROUP AT BAAL HATZOR, AND ONE EACH BY HAMMER (NRP) AND OLMERT (LIKUD--FREE CENTER) URGING THAT THE GROUP BE ALLOWED TO ESTABLISH FULL-FLEDGED SETTLEMENT.

5. ARYEH ELIAV, WHO RECENTLY BROKE FROM LABOR PARTY, ALSO PRESENTED A MOTION IN OPPOSITION TO BAAL HATZOR PROJECT AND TRIED TO FORCE ITS DEBATE BY FULL KNESSET. ALTHOUGH DEFEATED, THE PROPOSAL RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM ELIAV'S NEW YA'AD PARTY, MAPAM MEMBERS OF ALIGNMENT, AND THREE LABOR PARTY DOVES. TWO ADDITIONAL LABOR MKS PLUS THE INDEPENDENT LIBERAL MEMBERS ABSTAINED.

6. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, POLITICAL COMMITTEE OF MAPAM DECIDED JUNE 18 TO DEMAND THAT GOVERNMENT CLOSE SETTLEMENT AT MAHANE OFRA. ABSORPTION MINISTER ROSEN REPORTEDLY INSISTED THAT DEFMIN PERES HAD GIVEN PERMISSION FOR SETTLEMENT THERE, EVEN AS A WORK CAMP, WITHOUT AUTHORITY. ROSEN IS EXPECTED TO DEMAND CABINET DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUE. END UNCLASSIFIED.

7. COMMENT: BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL.WE DRAW THREE TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS FROM EVENTS INVOLVING MAHANE OFRA. FIRST, WHATEVER GOI CONFIDENTIAL

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DECISION-MAKING MACHINERY EXISTS FOR RATIONAL CONSIDERATION OF NEW SETTLEMENTS IN THE TERRITORIES OPERATES CREAKILY IF AT ALL, AND APPEARS TO HAVE NO FIRM POLICY TO GUIDE IT. (THIS IS ALSO BORNE OUT BY STORY OF KATZRIN ON GOLAN HEIGHTS - TEL AVIV 3744.) SECONDLY, THIS POLICY VACUUM ALLOWS PERES--AS MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TERRITORIES--TO OPERATE

WITH MAXIMUM POLITICAL FLEXIBILITY, KEEPING
ONE FOOT WITHIN OFFICIAL "GUIDELINES" AND ONE
IN THE PRO-SETTLEMENTS CAMP ON THE RIGHT. THIS
IS PROBABLY NOT AS UNCOMFORTABLE A POSITION AS
MIGHT BE EXPECTED FOR PERES OR HIS EX-RAFI
COLLEAGUES IN LABOR PARTY.

8. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT MAPAM WILL DELAY ITS
DEMAND FOR CABINET CONSIDERATION OF MAHANE OFRA
UNTIL AFTER THE CURRENT PHASE OF NEGOTIATIONS
WITH EGYPT IS COMPLETED, SO AS TO AVOID FURTHER
EMBARRASSMENT TO EITHER PERES OR RABIN. WHENEVER
THAT MAY BE, BURDEN OF DECISION WILL BE SQUARELY
ON RABIN, AS WAS CASE WITH MAALE ADUMIM. ALSO
AS WITH MAALE ADUMIM, PRIME MINISTER WILL UNDOUBTEDLY
MAKE DECISION WITH GREATER EYE TO ITS DOMESTIC
POLITICAL IMPACT THAN TO ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
AN EVENTUAL PEACE SETTLEMENT. END CONFIDENTIAL
VELIOTES

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